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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.**

**Reforming US National Security for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**by**

**Major Ford C. Phillips**

**USMC**

**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

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## **Abstract**

The National Security Act of 1947 and Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 deftly reorganized the United States national security apparatus during the 20th century. Learning from the failures of flawed practices and institutions, the 80<sup>th</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> US congress presided over legislation that forged the nation through the cold war, enhanced civil-military relations, and tore-down the obstacles of service parochialism. While these reforms allowed for the production and employment of highly effective military forces, recent operational experience indicates more reform of the national security apparatus is in order. Optimization, or maintaining or improving effectiveness while enhancing efficiency will become the object of national security reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This paper argues that the first step in this process will be to reorganize DoD staffs, to periodically review service roles and missions, and to ‘operationalize’ the NSC architecture to better meet future global security challenges.

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## INTRODUCTION

The US national security establishment has historically provided a favorite target for well-meaning American reformers. This is wholly appropriate, for in a constituted and free society disputes over the appropriateness of military expenditures, as well as the organizational efficiency and overall effectiveness of national security must always remain a topic of healthy debate. However, meaningful national security reform presents significant challenges and has occurred only twice since our nation emerged as the world's leading superpower following the Second World War. The National Security Act of 1947 (along with its amendments in 1949, 1953, and 1958) and Goldwater-Nichols 1986 emerged as the only landmark security reform legislation of the last 60 years. While few in number, the balance of historical evidence suggests that both pieces of legislation resulted in unmitigated success.

*Although imperfect, US military prowess following Goldwater-Nichols as evidenced in Operations JUST CAUSE, DESERT SHEILD/STORM, and ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM testify as excellent illustrations for the effect of a more direct national command structure and enhanced jointness and interoperability between the military services.*

Despite these 20<sup>th</sup> century advances within the Defense Department (DoD), new problems may loom along the national security horizon as both unnecessary redundancies and emerging gaps in capability have become exposed. Recent post-conflict reconstruction operations from Operation JUST CAUSE to IRAQI FREEDOM have indicated that not only the DoD, but much of the US Government (USG) are ill-prepared to execute the

requirements associated with nation building.<sup>1</sup> However, building upon this capacity while maintaining a working margin of dominance at the far end of the military spectrum may prove cost prohibitive. In any case, projected future federal budgetary constraints will required 21<sup>st</sup> century reformers will need to keep a closer eye on functional efficiencies than what was required by previous generations. Difficult questions remain. What further national security reform is necessary given the dynamic global security threat posed by our adversaries of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How can this reform be implemented to provide for the nation's security given arguably less future defense allocations? In answering these questions, this paper proposes that future national security reform should include optimizing DoD headquarters staffs and service roles and missions, and establishing Regional Security Councils with authorities commiserate to those of a geographic combatant commander .

## **BACKGROUND**

Poor interoperability of the services, inefficiency, and ineffective civil-military relationships provided the catalyst for military reform in the twentieth century. The National Security Act of 1947 sought to enhance these functions by codifying service roles and missions as well as establishing a single military department headed by appointed civilian official. Additionally, the act created the United States Air Force, the National Security Council, and the Central Intelligence Agency. However, the newly formed Defense Secretary's powers remained weak in relation to pre-existing service secretaries and chiefs. Two years after the 1947 act was signed into law, inaugural Defense Secretary Forrestal

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<sup>1</sup> Clark A. Murdock, *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era, Phase 1 Report.* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2004) 18-19.

resigned in frustration after failing to reach future roles, missions, and budgetary compromises with the service chiefs.<sup>2</sup> Later that year, Congress passed its first amendment to the 1947 act that both strengthened the power of the Defense Secretary and created a position for a non-voting military chairman to coalesce the efforts of Joint Chiefs.

However much an improvement over WWII service-centric parochialism, the National Security Act of 1947 and its subsequent amendments fell far short of creating a joint, interoperable force capable of executing the directives of the National Council as envisioned by President Eisenhower. Military strategic failure in Vietnam, combined with a string of operational embarrassments with the USS Pueblo, Beirut, Operation EAGLE CLAW, and Grenada laid the foundations for the next round of reform set to occur in the 1980s.

The Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 swept across the defense establishment profoundly altering how the US military would be commanded and employed.<sup>3</sup> The Act explicitly aimed to:

- **Strengthen civilian authority in the Department of Defense.**
- **Improve military advice to the POTUS, NSC, and Secretary of Defense.**
- **Place clear responsibility on the COCOMS for the accomplishment of missions assigned. Ensure COCOM authority is commensurate with responsibility.**
- **Increase strategy formulation and contingency planning capacity.**
- **Increase efficiency of defense resources.**
- **Improve joint officer management policies**
- **Enhance the effectiveness of military operations and improve the management and administration of the DoD.**

Figure 1: Objectives of Goldwater-Nichols. (Adapted from James R. Locher III, "Taking Stock of Goldwater-Nichols", *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Autumn 1996 85.)

<sup>2</sup> HASC, Panel on Roles and Missions, *Initial Perspectives*, GPO January 2008, 16.

<sup>3</sup> 99<sup>th</sup> Congress, *Public Law 99-443: Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986*, GPO, Oct 1986, 1.

Using multiple US military case studies following the passage of Goldwater-Nichols, it should be determined that significant progress on reaching most of these objectives has been met by the DoD. The following analysis will discuss and analyze areas for renewed innovation; first within and then beyond the Defense Department.

## **DISSCUSSION AND ANALYSIS: DOD STAFFS, SERVICE ROLES AND MISSIONS**

One recurring observation made by many within the Department of Defense is the extreme difficultly of accomplishing even routine tasks quickly. According to the Center of Strategic and International Studies' (CSIS) *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols* Phase 1 (BG-N) report, “Duplicative offices within the OSD, Joint Staff and the Military Departments can create excessive, wasteful coordination processes”.<sup>4</sup> The same report offers an example whereby an “OSD manpower executive must deal with one Joint Staff, three civilian (in the Service Secretariats) and four military (in the Service Staffs) counterparts.”<sup>5</sup> Beyond a simple frustration, these inefficiencies actually provide advocates of status quo solutions an excellent mechanism to ‘slow roll’ department initiatives for change. Ineffective organizational design at the national level of government affects the proper training, equipping and employing of forces at the operational and tactical level. Further, it violates the time honored military axiom that well-coordinated, aggressive, and decentralized execution springs forward from strong, clear, and centralized command and control.

Ironically, amidst these clear overlaps in staff function and capability, the OSD continues to be vexed by a growing lack of qualified civilian officials required to execute and manage programs on behalf of the Secretary. In the previous twenty years, evidence of the

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<sup>4</sup> Clark A. Murdock, *Phase 1 Report*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 26.

increasingly poor quality of the DoD civilian personnel system has been well documented by several study groups and commissions. According to a report issued by the *US Commission on National Security/21<sup>st</sup> Century*, “[a]s it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the United States finds itself on the brink of an unprecedented crisis of competence in government.”<sup>6</sup> Because of this shortfall, thousands of contractors and Field Operating Agencies (FOAs) are hired to shoulder additional workload. Conversely, within the joint staff (and increasingly so following the joint officer management policies stipulated by Goldwater-Nichols) there exists a significant pool of highly talented military officers. As a collective body, this staff provides the CJCS his critical ability to provide independent advice to the Secretary and President while also providing him required oversight of both the military services and the combatant commands. While the CJCS requires a separate and robust staff in order to provide truly independent military advice to the Secretary of Defense, NSC, and POTUS, there are several joint staff functions that the BG-N study group felt could be merged with their counterparts within OSD.<sup>7</sup> This paper will examine these possible solutions in the following section.

Perhaps the most perplexing staff redundancies within the Pentagon occur within the military services. Currently each service maintains two separate staffs with equivalent functions. A civilian secretariat which reports to the service secretary and a military staff, which reports to the service chief. This parallel construct exists today as legacy architecture with roots established prior to the consolidation of the military services in 1947. Prior to DoD consolidation, civil-military relations required a separation between these similar functions within each service. In deference to the long-standing and powerful service secretaries, the National Security Act of 1947 did not clearly establish a reporting structure for the service

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<sup>6</sup> US Commission on National Security/21<sup>st</sup> Century, Roadmap for National Security: Imperative for Change, Phase III Report, February 15, 2001, p. xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Clark A. Murdock, *Phase 1 Report*, 8.

secretaries then subordinated to the OSD. However, Goldwater-Nichols corrected this oversight by clearly establishing the service secretaries' authorities under their respective OSD under-secretary. Today, the powers of the civilian Secretary of Defense are at their height while the powers of the service secretaries are at a historical low. A strict legal framework exists to oversee the services within both OSD and the joint staff. Therefore, there no longer exists a need for the service secretaries to exercise independent oversight over their respective service. If anything, current Pentagon structuring suggests that to maximize effectiveness, each service should speak with only one voice.

As a final consideration for intra-military service reform, doctrinal service roles and missions should be re-evaluated to ensure missions codified in law over 60 years ago remain appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century security environment. The importance of roles and missions must not be understated despite the tremendous flexibility and adaptability demonstrated by our services over the last 20 years. Roles and missions establish the necessary datum that defines each service's core competencies as contributions to our nation's defense. Collectively, they define the capability of the Defense Department, as well as its role as a leading, but not lone, department or agency responsible for national security. Further, clearly defined service roles and missions aid the combatant commander in selecting the appropriate type and amount of forces required for componentancy in JTF operations at the theater-strategic and operational level of war. Even if no significant changes are made to service roles and missions, prudence requires a review of these missions periodically – perhaps as often as the global security environment changes – to ensure that this critical base-line datum is on the mark.

## RECOMENDATIONS: DOD STAFFS, SERVICE ROLES AND MISSIONS

This paper does not argue for any type of reorganization that would either weaken the powers of the Defense Secretary or the CJCS ability to provide adequate oversight or independent advice to the President. US national security reform has come too far and been too successful to endorse any measure that would unravel the positive effects of previous legislation. However, considering both the redundancies and limits of qualified civilian officials available described in the previous section, some consolidation is in order. The BG-N study group recommends that “For the personnel and logistics function, create an integrated civilian and military staff under a military deputy who reports directly to his respective Under Secretary.”<sup>8</sup>

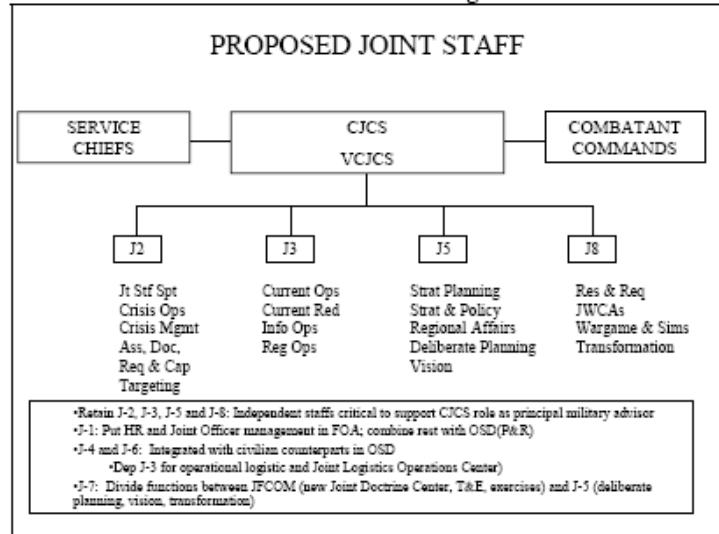


Figure 1: Proposed Joint Staff. (Reprinted from Clark A Murdock, *BG-N Phase 1 Report*, CSIS, 2004, 85.)

While the Secretary and President require the CJCS to provide independent strategic advice formed from the robust analytic abilities of his staff, there is little requirement for joint staff independence over the functions of personnel and logistics. A framework for merging these staffs already exists within the J-2, a directorate within the DIA that currently serves the Secretary and CJCS.<sup>9</sup> While largely factual entities not requiring independent review, both the J-1 and J-4 functional areas describe and, in some cases, define strategic means. It would dramatically improve OSD/Joint Staff efficiency, with no loss to CJCS independence, to

<sup>8</sup> Clark A. Murdock, *Phase 1 Report*, 32.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 32.

combine these functional areas. Also, combining these staffs would reduce requirements for increasingly scarce qualified civil-servants or federal contractors. While the CJCS role in the national government requires that he retain his independent staff across all other functional areas, merging the J-1 and J-4 from between the joint staff and OSD provide an opportunity for the DoD to better synchronize policy with strategic development.

According to the BG-N study group, “The most significant consolidation of staffs should occur at the level of the Military Departments.”<sup>10</sup> By combining each Service Secretariat into a single and integrated staff, the services can improve in both efficiency and effectiveness. The single service staff would report to both the service secretary as well as the service chief, ensure unity of effort, and reduce requirements for already constrained levels of civilian officials. While combining intra-service staffs is appropriate, maintaining the position and functions of the service secretary’s remains important. Service secretaries will continue to provide critical civil oversight to their services, as well as important political insight to the Service Chiefs.<sup>11</sup>

For the purpose of establishing a usable datum, periodic review of service roles and missions is a necessary function. However, as important as defining and understanding the DoD’s role as the leading department for our national defense, clearly defining which roles

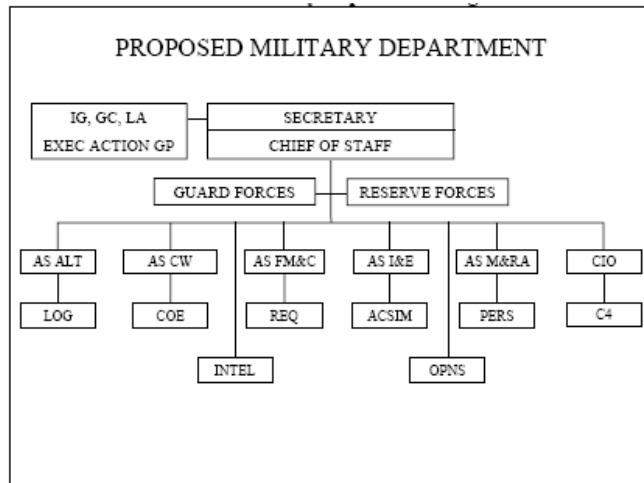


Figure 2: Proposed Military Department. (Reprinted from Clark A Murdock, *BG-N Phase 1 Report*, CSIS, 2004, 84.)

<sup>10</sup> Clark A. Murdock, *Phase 1 Report*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 32.

and missions are not collectively the DoDs responsibility is equally important.<sup>12</sup> Reviewing service roles and missions will provide critical insight into what functions the DoD can not currently perform competently. These deficiencies, if found in key areas, can either be corrected within the department, or assigned as a codified competency to be mastered by an adjacent department or federal agency. Adequate, periodic review of service roles and missions enables executive and legislative leaders the insights required to audit and refine the capabilities and authorities of all federal departments and agencies.

Many service leaders disagree that roles and missions need to be reviewed, feeling that re-opening this admittedly contentious issue would only re-invigorate dormant parochialism and dissipate growing gains in ‘jointness’. Their sentiments are reinforced by the conclusions of the President of the CSIS, John Hambre. In his June 19, 2007 he testified to the HASC that “legislation [forcing] the Defense Department to undertake core-competency and roles and missions reviews will only reinforce the things that the services do well and keep [them] from focusing on the things that [they do] not do as well.”<sup>13</sup> However distasteful a task this may be, it remains one of the necessary first steps in coalescing the greatest future DoD capability given current trends in the global security environment. Perhaps realizing this point, in passing the 2008 Defense Authorization Act, the HASC has required the Secretary of Defense to conduct a comprehensive review of military service roles and missions during FY 2008.<sup>14</sup> For reasons mentioned previously, this FY 2008 legislative requirement marks an obvious initial step towards making informed decisions about future national security reform.

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<sup>12</sup> HASC, *Panel on Roles and Missions: Initial Perspectives* (GPO, January 2008) 19.

<sup>13</sup> Excerpt from the testimony of John Hambre as found in HASC, *Panel on Roles and Missions: Initial Perspectives*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Excerpt from HASC Report 110-46 as found in HASC, *Panel on Roles and Missions: Initial Perspectives*, 19.

## **DISSCUSSION AND ANALYSIS: INTERAGENCY AUTHORITIES**

The focus of this paper is not inter-agency reform, but national security reform. The previous section discussed measures the DoD could take to reduce waste and friction while enhancing effectiveness at the military strategic level. Reviewing service roles and missions will provide the needed input for determining competencies across all federal departments and agencies. With Goldwater-Nichols in mind, this section will analyze the current national security policy implementation process with the hopes of arguing for a more direct, efficient model to execute Presidential policies. The first requirement should be to clarify that the “President alone decides national security policy.”<sup>15</sup> To aid in his decision-making, and to facilitate the implementation of his policy, the US congress created as part of the 1947 National Security Act, the National Security Council (NSC). The statutory members of this council include the President, Vice President, and Secretaries of Defense and State. The Director of Central Intelligence (replaced in 2002 by the Director of National Intelligence) is the NSC statutory intelligence advisor, while the CJCS serves as the statutory military advisor. Although not a statutory member, in 1953, the position of National Security Advisor was added and made responsible for “determining the agenda in consultation with regular attendees of the NSC, ensuring that the necessary papers are prepared, recording NSC deliberations, and disseminating Presidential decisions.”<sup>16</sup>

In the years following 1947, each administration has placed varying emphasis on their NSC and its staff organization. The Act forming the NSC provides the President that discretion, citing the NSC’s function “shall be to advise the President with respect to the

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<sup>15</sup> Alan G. Whittaker, Fredrick C. Smith, Elizabeth McKune, *The National Security Policy Process; The National Security Council and Interagency System*, (GPO August 2005), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 7-9.

integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies related to the national security so as to enable the military services and other departments and agencies of the government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving national security.”<sup>17</sup> At the national-strategic level, the NSC with its statutory members, additional members (administration and crisis-specific), and sub-committees appears to provide the precise solution to the problems constantly identified in recent post-conflict reconstruction case studies requiring whole-of government effectiveness.

As the National Security Act of 1947 clearly demonstrates, poor inter-agency coordination is not a uniquely 21<sup>st</sup> century concern. In fact, the body of National Security Council was created to improve upon this very limitation. At the national-strategic level, the NSC is very effective in accomplishing its chartered objectives. What then, about the NSC and its staff, can be improved to enhance the national security apparatus at the operational or theater-strategic level? This paper proposes that the current NSC construct provides for the adequate integration of defense and other departments and agencies for policy formulation and dissemination, but lacks a mechanism with corresponding authorities to provide coordinated implementation of these policies at the regional level. The problem is a lack of connective tissue, below the level of the Principles and Deputies Committees, imbued with the statutory authorities to request, organize, and implement the means required to achieve national security policy objectives. However, using the successful NSC and combatant commander constructs as a roadmaps, only the means remain to be determined to correct the problems of national policy implementation at the regional level.

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<sup>17</sup> 80<sup>th</sup> US Congress, *Public Law 235: National Security Act of 1947* (GPO, 26 Jul 1947) 1.

## RECOMENDATIONS: INTERAGENCY AUTHORITIES

As mentioned above, the NSC is nominally comprised of a Principles Committee (PC) and Deputies Committee (DC). According to Dr. Alan Whittaker of National Defense University, the PC is the nation's "most senior, regularly constituted interagency group". The PC is normally chaired by the NSA, and is comprised of the statutory members of the NSC minus the President.<sup>18</sup> Completing much of the policy analysis and document preparation for PC approval is the DC, comprised of deputy under secretaries of each of the federal agencies. Beneath the DC are a multitude of regionally and functionally based Policy Coordination Committees (PCCs) normally chaired by either an under secretary of state or NSC senior director.<sup>19</sup> While these regionally or functionally based inter-agency working groups are deeply involved in the coordination and implementation of national policy, they currently have no authorities to direct actions across the federal departments. That authority remains two levels above where the policy is being implemented - residing with either the President or the members of the PC.

This paper argues that to improve national security policy implementation, authorities, like those enumerated to the combatant commanders, should be extended to formalized Regional Security Councils (RSC). RSCs would resemble current Regional PCCs, but would become 'operationalized' within the national security chain-of-command. Just as combatant commanders are responsible to the President via the Secretary of Defense, the Directors of the RSCs would be responsible to the President via the chairman of the PC. As with arrangements prescribed by Goldwater-Nichols, the separate executive agencies, like the military services after 1986, should become resource providers to the various RSCs.

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<sup>18</sup> Alan G. Whittaker, *National Security Policy Process*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 13.

RSCs should initially be led by professional Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) possessing both regional and diplomatic expertise. As they become available, qualified National Security Officials (NSO) should replace FSOs becoming responsible for the implementation of national security policy in their respective regions. RSA directors should therefore report directly to the unified PC and not their respective parent department secretaries or agency chiefs. A simple example of how RSCs could enhance national security policy implementation would be by synchronizing regional boundaries between the Departments of State and Defense. RSCs could not function without all elements of the US government sharing a common operational picture of the world. Like current regionally based PCCS, RSCs will continue to consist of functional, in addition to regional expertise.

With dueling strategic to operational chains of command extending from the President, it will become important to resolve the command relationships between the RSCs and the existing geographic combatant commands. This paper argues, that under normal conditions short of war, the RSCs should operate as the supported command and the geographic combatant commanders as the supporting command. Under these conditions, Task Forces assigned by the combatant commander to support RSC policy implementation plans would report to the civilian defense officials within the RSC and not to the combatant commander. As a statutory advisor the PC, the CJCS would continue to provide oversight for all military activities (just as he does with the combatant commanders), and the Secretary of Defense retains his position the chain of command. Combatant Commanders would maintain a direct line of coordination with their respective RSCs via their organic Joint Inter-Agency Coordination Groups (JIACG)s.

When, in times of violent crisis or national emergency indicating a likelihood for armed conflict emerge, the relationships between RSCs and the geographic combatant commanders should reverse. Under these conditions, the military combatant commanders become the supported command, and the RSCs the supporting. Operational lines of command authority prescribed by Goldwater-Nichols would remain in effect under conditions of war. In a supporting role, selected members of the RSC staff should be made available to displace forward to either integrate into the combatant command or JTF staff, or augment an existing combatant command JIACG. These augments, with a reach back capability to the RSC, will enhance the combatant commanders ability to fight and win the current conflict bringing the full resources of the federal government to bear.

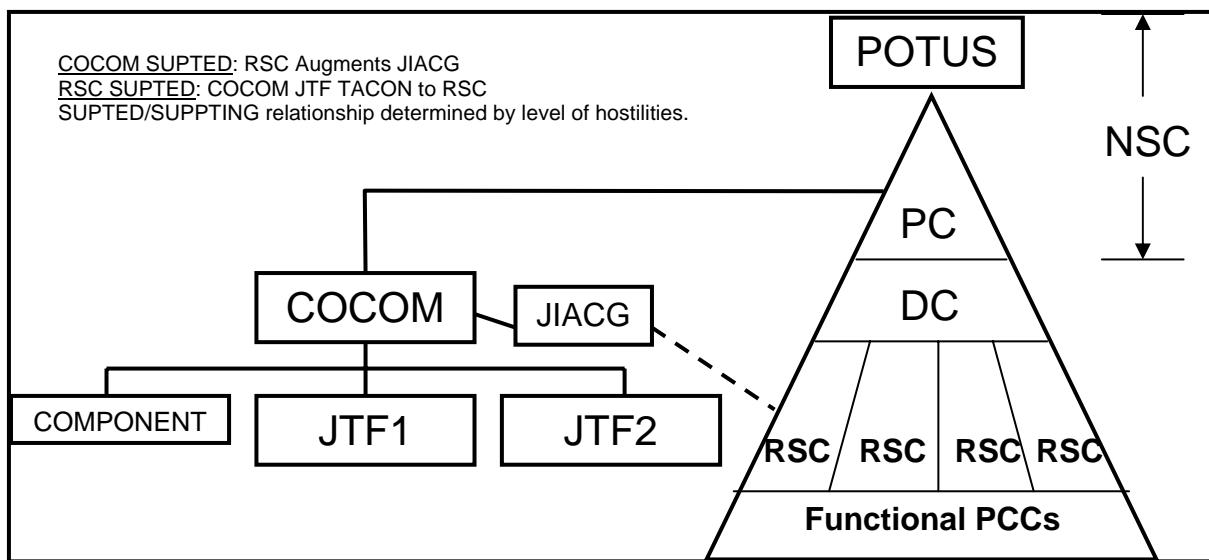


Figure 3: Proposed RSC Organizational Chart

Additionally, these augments will provide the combatant commands greater subject-matter expertise in the planning for effective transition into post-conflict operations. As combat operations end and the transition to post-conflict stability operations begin, command relationships between the combatant commanders and the RSC will revert to the pre-hostilities model.

Extending the principles of Goldwater-Nichols legislation to departments and agencies outside of the DoD is common conversation among national security reformers, think tanks, and study groups. Applying the same logic that resulted in the establishment of regional combatant commands to the current NSC apparatus provides the most effective and efficient opportunity to accomplish this goal.

## CONCLUSION

Reform of the US national security establishment has proven a slow and arduous process. The nation's last comprehensive effort at reform occurred more than 20 years ago when the nation was still embroiled in the throws of the Cold War. However infrequent, when the passions of our people and the skill of our elected leaders converge to advance our common defense, the resulting product has been encouraging. But what events will force these factors to converge for the next round of legislative reform? While military victories in Panama, Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan indicate a level of strict military competence difficult to improve upon, civil-military failures during the security and reconstruction phases of these same operations point to vulnerability. Economic force will continue to play a role in the future of the US national security apparatus arguably driving the political leadership to more efficient solutions to problems. As poignantly identified in 2008 by the US HASC, "If we still have security problems with a half-trillion dollar budget, the Pentagon must need reforming."<sup>20</sup> A true statement, but as the paper has argued, the need for additional reform extends beyond the DoD.

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<sup>20</sup> HASC, *Initial Perspectives*, 13.

In light of the changing global security environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and with lessons learned from the failures of post conflict reconstruction and stability operations from OPERATIONS JUST CAUSE, IRAQI FREEDOM, and ENDURING FREEDOM, the time to address future reform is now. The US government can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of its national security apparatus by re-organizing OSD, Joint, and Service Staffs and by properly empowering the NSC architecture for 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.

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